



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Private Wells Require Private Eyes

Ground Water Awareness Week — March 8-14, 2009

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

When you turn on the tap in your home, are you sure the water that comes out is safe? For most people, the city where they live ensures the purity of the water. But for the more than 15 million American households that use private wells, water safety is a personal issue. The EPA regulations that protect public drinking water don't apply to the private systems.

Dr. Joan Brunkard is an epidemiologist with CDC's Division of Parasitic Diseases and she's joining us today to discuss the importance of water safety for people with private wells. Welcome to the show, Joan.

[Dr. Brunkard] Thanks, Bob; it's good to be here.

[Dr. Gaynes] Joan, why do people choose to have private wells rather than tap into a city's water system?

[Dr. Brunkard] I think there are a variety of reasons, Bob. The most common is geographic distance. You're in a remote area or an area that's not close to the public water system. Other reasons might be historical use or personal preference.

[Dr. Gaynes] Well, where is the safest place for a person to dig a well on their property?

[Dr. Brunkard] You definitely wanna locate your well in an area where rain water flows away from the well. This is frequently an elevated location, but if you can't do that, you wanna make sure that the water or any kind of runoff will flow away from the top of the well. You also wanna make sure that your well is located away from septic systems, onsite waste water, any animal enclosures, and any areas where you store chemicals, paints, pesticides, fertilizers, that kind of thing.

[Dr. Gaynes] Joan, how common are waterborne outbreaks associated with private well water and what types of illnesses are associated with these outbreaks?

[Dr. Brunkard] We usually get several outbreaks reported involving private wells and, over the years, these have involved viruses, bacteria, parasites. Recently, associated with well water, we've seen outbreaks of hepatitis A and norovirus, *E coli* and *Campylobacter*, and *Giardia*, which is a parasitic infection.

[Dr. Gaynes] How often should a private well be inspected?

[Dr. Brunkard] Every year, this is the main focus of National Ground Water Awareness Week, is to stress the importance of getting your annual private well check-up, which should be done by a licensed water well professional who can inspect the well and look for the structural integrity of it to make sure there are no cracks in the casing, that the cap is sealed properly, and also to test the water for bacteria, nitrates, and other contaminants of local concern. You can get a list of licensed professionals from your local health department or from the yellow pages.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information on water safety and private wells?

[Dr. Brunkard] They can go to our website, www.cdc.gov, and search on private wells.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks Joan. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Joan Brunkard about the importance of water safety and private wells. Remember, if you have a private well, have the water tested annually and the well inspected by a licensed contractor to keep the water in your home safe to drink.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.